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Being Black or Being White

Growing up as an African-American I was never thought that there was such think as speaking white or even speaking black. My parents always taught me that there was no such thing as black and white and that we are racially equal. Speaking black can be thought of as speaking what the linguists (people who study language), would call Ebonics’. Speaking black to me just doesn’t exist because to some speaking black is just slang. Speaking Ebonics’ is naturally a part of everyone’s life whether people believe it or not. Language has evolved over time to become more and more of what it is currently. We all have the power to change words and their meaning. Back in the 1800’s during the slavery era, the slaves changed words the words to tailor their needs. This still happens today. We change the words thanks to Ebonics’ and we don’t even realize the change that we cause. Being black or being white has nothing to do with the change that we cause. Ebonics’ is gender and race neutral or so I’d like to think.

Upon doing some research on speaking black, I dove more and more into details about it. The word Ebonics’ stems from the word ebony which pertains to people whom are from West Africa. What happens when we use Ebonics is that we blend words from American English and we blend them with the words of the language that comes from West Africa. Now I am aware that we do not speak the West African language or languages, but similar syllables or even words are left off the ends of words. When we say a phrase such as “Lookin’ good” (29) we don’t realize that we are using Ebonics’. Ebonics’ is very important when we want to explain how we came to become such a language surrounded Country. Research began on finding out this information back in the 1880’s. James A Harrison studied “Negro English” back in 1884 and he wrote such findings in a journal called Angila. Much later in history in the year 1960, a woman by the name of Dr. Beryl Bailey who hailed from Jamaica. She challenged the idea of black inferiority and how education changes and challenges this idea. W. E. DuBois believed that we should educate the generations to come about Ebonics’ and how they are going to shape the way that they speak (Smitherman 33-4). Dr. Bailey thought that the Education system in America sought to diminish the usage of Ebonics’ among black students in order to make them sound more white. We have control over the way we speak, but we have very little control over the education system.

Some people have been taught to speak white in order to be more prevalent in the education community. However, there is a problem with that statement. Some black students have been told that they Black Language is slang and that Black English is not a language. We learned to communicate with one another and it began with the slaves. “Black English is the creation of the black diaspora. Blacks came to the United States chained to each other, but from different tribes: Neither could speak the other's language” (Baldwin 6). We use language as a means to communicate, but if we continue to tell black students to learn how to speak or act white, we are telling them that something that they have spoken all of their lives is now irrelevant. Blacks and whites both use Ebonics’ which I am sure you understand by now. It’s nothing new to you by this point in time. A famous African-American poet and activist by the name of Mya Angelou wrote a poem about how we use Ebonics and how people use to believe that was a means of downing people who were of the African-American race. The poem that she wrote was titled The Thirteens. Her poem teaches that Ebonics’ is in fact a language.

Ebonics’ in the eyes of those whom are not black, is just slang. Black students have been taught to use what is called WME or White Mainstream English. This would mean that they have been taught to use the proper way to speak. (Baugh 186). Black English is not commonly spoken and is very irregular. If a student wants to feel like they are succeeding they should try their best to learn the WME language. Most black students have a problem with learning to speak WME and teachers lack in seeing that. Speaking Black English is a hard habit to break. As a child I did not have a problem with learning to speak proper English due to my parents teaching me how to speak proper English, however, when I would speak to my grandparents I would have a hard time understanding them because they sounded like they spoke broken English. When I grew older I knew that it was just a southern thing and that it was indeed Ebonics’.

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